

ATTENTION SENSATION PERCEPTION

Approaches to the Study of Perception:

Gestalt approaches

- ☐ Gestalt psychology, school of psychology founded in the 20th century that provided the foundation for the modern study of perception.
- ☐ Gestalt theory emphasizes that the whole of anything is greater than its parts. That is, the attributes of the whole are not deducible from analysis of the parts in isolation.
- ☐ The word Gestalt is used in modern German to mean the way a thing has been “placed,” or “put together.” There is no exact equivalent in English. “Form” and “shape” are the usual translations; in psychology the word is often interpreted as “pattern” or “configuration.”
- ☐ The publication of Czech-born psychologist Max Wertheimer’s “Experimentelle Studien über das Sehen von Bewegung” (“Experimental Studies of the Perception of Movement”) in 1912 marks the founding of the Gestalt school.
- ☐ In it Wertheimer reported the result of a study on apparent movement conducted in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, with psychologists Wolfgang Köhler and Kurt Koffka. Together, these three formed the core of the Gestalt school for the next few decades. (By the mid-1930s all had become professors in the United States.)
- ☐ The earliest Gestalt work concerned perception, with particular emphasis on visual perceptual organization as explained by the phenomenon of illusion.
- ☐ In 1912 Wertheimer discovered the phi phenomenon, an optical illusion in which stationary objects shown in rapid succession, transcending the threshold at which they can be perceived separately, appear to move. The explanation of this phenomenon—also known as persistence of vision and experienced when viewing motion pictures—provided strong support for Gestalt principles.
- ☐ Gestalt psychologists argued that these principles exist because the mind has an innate disposition to perceive patterns in the stimulus based on certain rules. These principles are



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organized into five categories: Proximity, Similarity, Continuity, Closure, and Connectedness.

Max Wertheimer

- The founder of Gestalt psychology; Kurt Koffka and Wolfgang Kohler followed Wertheimer.
- Wertheimer became aware of a form of apparent motion that was called “phi phenomenon”.
- Phi phenomenon = when two lights are in close proximity to each other, flashing alternately, appear to be one light moving back and forth; therefore the whole was different from the separate parts.
- Movement is perceived whereas it never occurred.
- Explanation of phi phenomenon led to a separate school of thought that had deep rooted impact on learning, ethics, and social psychology.
- We perceive experiences in a way that calls for the simplest explanation, even though reality may be entirely different. We tend to organize our experience so that it is as simple as possible. = Gestalt Law of Minimum Principle.
- Gestalt Psychology maintained that the main task of psychology is to explain attitudes, events, behaviors etc as ‘complete’ or ‘whole’ __ not in terms of elements or disintegrated parts; the overall impact is what makes perception.

Figure and Ground

- o How do we perceive a figure against a background?
- o Certain processes are involved in distinguishing a certain figure or object from a ground.
- o We do not just passively receive what is reflected on to our retinas; we try to give a meaning to what we see, and therefore ‘understand’ our sensations

Gestalt Laws of Perceptual Organization

Organizing raw sensory stimuli into meaningful experiences involve “cognition”, a set of mental activities that includes thinking, knowing, and remembering. Knowledge and experiences are extremely important for perception, because they help us make sense of the input to our sensory systems.

1. The Law of Closure.
2. The Law of Proximity.
3. The Law of Continuity.
4. The Law of Similarity.
5. The Law of Simplicity.
6. The Law of Common Fate.
7. The Law of Enclosure/ Connectivity



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